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the Mayor  
Burlington,  
Vermont**



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**STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS  
MAYOR BOB KISS  
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Good evening and welcome. I would like to extend a special welcome to the new city council members Craig Gutchell and Ed Adrian. I look forward to working with you over the next year.

I am happy to report that the state of the city is good.

**The state of the city is good because the city's economy is sound.** In September, Moody's Investor Service once again rated the city bond status as Aa3. Moody's Economy.com also ranked the Burlington metropolitan area number one in the country in its business vitality index, up from number 14 the year before. Revenue from the local option 1% sales tax is higher than anticipated in the first two quarters of 07. And, a recent survey shows that 80% of Marketplace businesses had higher retail sales this past year.

This strong economy let us build a budget that fully funded the pension liability, maintained city services and began to restore city reserves to an appropriate level. This budget also reflects the cost containment goals outlined by the City Council in its Super Budget Committee Report. The FY'07 budget was developed with the able assistance of a seven member citizen budget committee. I want to thank these members for the time, creativity and commitment they brought to very a complex and challenging discussion. Five member of the '07 committee are serving on an expended FY08 citizen budget committee which includes nineteen additional members. The new members were selected by the Neighborhood Planning

Assemblies or chosen at random to represent their wards. Increased citizen participation in the process will only enhance the City's development of a sound budget.

Last year we also established the City Retirement Task Force to assess and make recommendations about the city's retirement system. The city pension fund lost almost one third of its value between 2000 and 2002. Although it has made gains since, it has not fully recovered. The Task force will continue to recommend how best to improve investment and avoid losses, examine current investment and plan benefits and propose long term solutions for sustainable pension benefits. This Task Force has been meeting regularly and will continue its advisory work until we are confident every step has been taken to protect and deliver on the City's pension responsibilities. I would like to thank the members of this Task Force for their ongoing work on this important issue.

Even though we may build a sound, fiscally prudent budget, we cannot ignore the fact that many Burlington residents are struggling to pay their property taxes even with the income sensitivity in Acts 60 and 68. At the same time, the high cost of health care is a financial burden to all of us while the war in Iraq diverts federal tax dollars away from domestic needs. Last year when I took office I said that I would establish a committee to look at alternatives to the property tax. I will name members to that committee by May 1<sup>st</sup>. Their recommendations should help us build an FY09 budget that eases the property tax burden on homeowners and renters alike.

**The state of the city is good because Burlington's strong economy is a sustainable economy.** The city has made a long term commitment to local ownership and the development of small and micro businesses. Just two weeks ago CEDO sponsored a home based business fair. Over 80 home based businesses participated. Over the past year, the city's development activities helped create 690 full time permanent jobs and 1,128 construction jobs. It is clear that businesses continue to choose Burlington.

Anyone who has taken an early morning flight from Burlington knows that the Burlington International Airport plays an important role in the city's economic

development. Several months ago the north wing opened with four additional gates. And all passengers now have access to free WiFi. At the same time, the Airport is committed to a greener future. Building on past efforts, the airport purchased electronic and hybrid vehicles. It uses biodiesel in all its diesel powered equipment and it has installed public electric vehicle charging units. It has switched to safer and greener cleaning products and has successfully installed public recycling containers. The Airport reflects both the city's economic vitality and its commitment to protecting the environment.

Access to high quality broad band telecommunication services is important to the city's economic vitality. The first new north end customers were hooked up to Burlington Telecom last week, and 60 new homes in the new north end will be added to the network each week joining more than 1000 customers already receiving services. When fully built, Burlington Telecom will pay for itself and should provide additional income to the city.

The City is working on a variety of initiatives to improve economic mobility for Burlington residents. The City's free income tax preparation site at City Hall served 120 low-income taxpayers this year, helping them to get back over \$173,000 in refunds (not counting renters rebates). The City helped to launch the NeighborKeepers Circles of Support pilot program, which saw its seven participating families gain a 69% increase in monthly wages and reduce their use of public benefits by 28% in the first six months. The city continues to work with the National League of Cities as one of six cities in the country participating in the League's Family Asset-Building Initiative.

Working in partnership with the private and nonprofit sectors, the City has also made gains meeting the demand for housing that is affordable to residents with a range of incomes.

We have improved the affordable housing rental stock. The city helped the Burlington Community Land Trust and the Lake Champlain Housing Development Corporation join together as one organization, the Champlain Housing Trust. Now, this new housing trust is completing a major rehab of 28 low-income apartments scattered in 4 different buildings in the Old North End.

And, we are creating affordable homeownership. Champlain Housing Trust is working on the first ever nonprofit condominium conversion of 10 apartments on Blodgett Street – several of the tenants will buy their apartments and the remaining units will be sold to low and moderate income households. Green Mountain Habitat for Humanity and the City are working together on several projects that will result in affordable homes for 13 very low income homebuyers.

Our most vulnerable populations are also being served. The Burlington Housing Authority has begun renovation of an abandoned duplex on Cherry Street that will house up to 10 women transitioning from the Department of Corrections. Through a partnership of local and state agencies and organizations, these women will have the structure and support they need to successfully rejoin the community. In the new north end, the BHA will construct transitional housing for women and their children who are victims of domestic violence.

**The State of the City is good because Burlington has a vibrant waterfront.**

Less than two decades ago, there was virtually no publicly owned property along the lakeshore. Burlington's waterfront has been transformed into an accessible community resource, with more than 70 acres of publicly owned land. We will continue to work on waterfront revitalization, addressing storm water issues and improving pedestrian and bike connections on lower College Street. But most importantly, I want to move forward with a new vision for the Moran Plant. Over the past two years, the City has been engaged in a process to determine the future use of the Moran Plant. This process involved over 10,000 community members. It began with a survey of Burlington residents and culminated in concept drawings that were unveiled at an open house at the Moran plant this past September.

We have established the following ten principles to guide the redevelopment of the Moran Plant:

- Ensure permanent public ownership and control
- Create year round use
- Create and extend elements of the Waterfront Park
- Minimize undue traffic and parking issues

- Retain the Lake Champlain Sailing Center
- Provide opportunity for new public and private partnerships
- Utilize the existing building shell and retain historical elements whenever possible
- Generate income for operations and maintenance
- Keep development costs reasonable
- Utilize the highest possible standards in energy conservation and green building construction

I am convinced now more than ever that we should retain the existing structure. I envision a new Moran Plant, a revitalized building housing the Lake Champlain Community Sailing Center, and other community based amenities like a roof top restaurant, a real outdoor skating rink, a children's spray park, children's museum, maritime museum or indoor rock and ice climbing center. I will soon announce a process to guide us for the next year. I will appoint an advisory group to assist us as we move forward. I am certain the members of the Council through the Parks, Arts and Culture Committee will play a key role leading this effort.

**The state of the city is good because Burlington is a livable city.** Burlington continues to be a cultural and recreation destination. The Parks, Art and Library Departments work with private and public partners to provide a rich menu of events and activities for Burlington residents. This wealth of recreation and cultural opportunities earn the city accolades year after year.

Burlington is one of three communities chosen nationally by the AARP to pilot a Livable Communities initiative. Through CEDO, the City is working with AARP – Vermont, other City departments and a broad array of community partners to develop a vision for making Burlington a great place for older residents – with affordable and appropriate housing, an array of mobility options, and community services that meet the needs of older residents. This is an initiative that will benefit all residents, regardless of age.

We have also started an innovative project to help victims of crime regardless of whether the offender is caught or prosecuted. The City is one of three demonstration sites selected nationally to design, implement and evaluate this

“parallel” system of justice for victims of crime. The Parallel Justice Project is coordinated through CEDO’s Center for Community and Neighborhoods, partnering with the State of Vermont Center for Crime Victim Services and the Burlington Police Department. It has the unanimous support of the City Council, which passed a resolution last October establishing a Parallel Justice Commission. Working together, we are providing a community response to crime that goes beyond the criminal justice system.

Last May, in my first month as Mayor, I attended a Pedestrian Summit here in Contois Auditorium. It brought together residents, several city departments, and community organizations to gather information and share ideas about making Burlington more pedestrian-friendly. The Summit laid the foundation for our efforts over the last year to make our streets and sidewalks better places to walk and bike. The city – working with the Burlington Bicycle Council, AARP-Vermont, Local Motion, the Vermont Bicycle and Pedestrian Coalition, Public Works and the Burlington Police Department – coordinated a broad bicycle and pedestrian safety campaign. These efforts included public education and outreach, focused enforcement of traffic laws, and events around pedestrian issues. Public Works has also been working on a transportation plan for the city that reflects the importance of bike and pedestrian safety. I’m pleased we’ve paid attention to this issue, but we can and should do more. Improving pedestrian and bicycle safety is key to making Burlington a more livable city. Safety for pedestrians and bicyclists is important for all residents and for our environment.

Finally, the vote by the city council last fall to sell land in the Intervale to the Intervale Center will enhance Burlington’s livability. The sale preserves open space for agriculture, recreation and conservation in the city forever. The city retains an ownership interest in the land so it will always remain an active partner with the Intervale Center in determining how the land will be used and managed.

**The state of the city is good because Burlington is a green city.** Burlington was recently named the greenest city in the country by Country Home Magazine. It was also ranked second out of 72 cities in the Earth Day Network’s Urban Environment Report released in February. However, we cannot rest on these accolades. It is all too obvious that the future is here and now on the environment.

We will continue to push forward on environmental and energy sustainability through initiatives such as the Legacy Project, the Climate Action Plan, the Burlington Electric Department's use of renewable energy sources, commitment to energy conservation and demand-side management, the 10% Challenge and support of local businesses and food production. This winter, the Burlington City Council passed a resolution calling for the appointment of a Mayoral task force to assess the City's progress on environmental issues and to suggest new opportunities for reducing greenhouse gas emissions that cause global warming. By May 1<sup>st</sup>, I will appoint the Environmental and Energy Coordinating Committee (E2C2) to monitor and coordinate our work in the area of energy sustainability. It is imperative that we continue to respond to this challenge. I expect, and residents should expect, Burlington to maintain its status as a national and international leader on protecting the environment and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

**The state of the city is good because Burlington has quality essential services.**

The people of Burlington experienced a tragedy last fall when UVM student Michelle Gardner-Quinn was reported missing and later found dead. Throughout all of the investigation and work leading to an arrest the performance of the Burlington Police Department was exemplary. I'd like to recognize the leadership of Police Chief Tom Tremblay and all of the other members of the Burlington Police Department again for their work during this difficult time and for the work that they do day in and day out to serve the people of Burlington.

I'm sure we'll always remember the Valentine's Day Blizzard of '07. I want to take this opportunity to thank all the city departments and staff who successfully met the challenge of this storm –the city employees who cleared the streets and sidewalks and airport runways, police and fire who responded to all emergencies and, a special thanks to DPW and Parks Department staff who worked 24 hours a day for seven days to dig us out. And a special thanks to the 75 or more volunteers who responded to Operation Snow Shovel's call for assistance. Finally, a thank you to all Burlington residents for your patience and good will during this event.

**The state of the city is good because Burlington's neighborhoods are thriving.**

Two weeks ago I had the pleasure of presenting the Herb Blumenthal Award for Citizen Activism to Richard Kemp at the 7<sup>th</sup> annual Neighborhood Night of

Success. More than fifteen other individuals or groups received awards. This auditorium was filled to capacity with people who were here to celebrate their commitment to their neighbors, their street, and their community. The city supports neighborhoods in many ways – through the Center for Community and Neighborhoods, community policing, coordinated code enforcement, city wide recycling, expanded street and sidewalk maintenance, a comprehensive neighborhood noise strategy, through its financial support for CCTA and its commitment to maintaining community schools. But the city cannot take the commitment, enthusiasm and dedication of all these neighbors for granted. As the city builds its budget and allocates its resources it must remember that vital neighborhoods are the foundation of our community.

Over the next year my administration will work hard to keep you better informed about our activities including our achievements and challenges as we move forward. All my press releases will be posted on the Mayor's website along with From the Mayor's Desk, a newsletter for city employees and partners. I encourage you to visit the city website regularly for this information.

We face two significant challenges in the very near future, developing a budget for FY08 and completion of the zoning rewrite. These two challenges will be a priority for my administration over the next several months. I am confident that we will have the continued support and commitment of the city council as we work to address these issues. We must have a budget for FY08 and we must complete the zoning rewrite by June 30.

Finally, I would just like to say that this has been an extraordinary year for me. I have new respect for this office and for all the people in city government who do the City's business every day. I have renewed respect for the residents of this city who are engaged in their neighborhoods, schools, religious and community organizations and who work tirelessly to make this city the special place that it is. And, I have renewed respect for the young people in Burlington. During the past year I participated in the walking school bus, read to kids at school and celebrated their achievements at award ceremonies. Each time, they were engaged, inquisitive, enthusiastic and welcoming. If Burlington's children and youth are a measure of the state of the city, then the city is truly in good shape. This is a great



city with a great future and I'm looking forward to the next year. As always, it is a privilege to serve as your Mayor.

Thank you.